

A Nuclear North Korea?

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PREFACE

This paper is the culmination of several months of work in partial fulfillment of a Master of Military Studies. But it seems much more than that to me. I have learned much more about Korea than I had set out to learn at the beginning of the academic year, primarily because this project has been transformed over time. This is my first effort at a work of this length and breadth, and as such I believe that it falls a bit short of my objectives.

I have a much better understanding of what it means to write as a “system expert” after doing this research and writing, although I am far from being an expert in Korean affairs. I suppose few authors complete a work exactly as they had intended it when they began, but mine has shifted dramatically from its genesis. I originally wanted to write about the dangers of nuclear proliferation since the end of the Cold War, the relevancy of the Trident ballistic missile submarine force, and the resources that the U.S. Navy could apply to help stem the tide of this global problem. After focusing on a region of the world, my subject narrowed down to North Korea, and eventually became what it is in this finished product – a critique of U.S. policy. However, the amount of time and space in which I have been working leaves my project with, I fear, inadequate treatment of some ideas while I dwell too much on others. Perhaps I will work to improve it for its own merits at a later time.

I am indebted to Colonel Paul F. Chamberlin, USA (retired), for his assistance in critically reviewing my work along the way and allowing me the opportunity to interview a true expert in Korean affairs. I am also very thankful to Dr. Kamal A. Beyoghlou, a political scientist and regular consultant to the U.S. government on numerous issues related to American foreign policy, and Commander Roy J. Geberth, USN, both of whom were my mentors for this project as faculty members at the USMC Command and Staff College. They have provided immeasurable strategic assistance in concept development and helping me focus my thoughts properly.

Lastly, I would like to thank my sweet wife, Amy, for her great patience and perseverance as I spent long hours researching the topic and agonizing over just the right words to write. She has also been instrumental as my editor of sorts, in reviewing my paper for grammatical errors and ensuring it just made sense.

-Glenn H. Porterfield
13 April 2004

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: A Nuclear North Korea?

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Thesis: This essay will analyze the development of the current nuclear crisis from the most important aspect of all – through the eyes of the North Korean leadership. The essay will argue that current U.S. policy towards North Korea is too hard-line and inflexible, and that in order to maintain stability and achieve national strategic goals with respect to the Asia-Pacific region, U.S. policymakers must comprehend and adapt to the myriad of experiences which affect the Korean psyche.

Discussion:

The primary, overriding concern in East Asia, from the U.S. point of view, is regional stability because of the impact it has on U.S. national security interests. Many factors go into maintaining the stability of this region, and the Korean peninsula is at the crossroads. Understanding the historic background and cultural underpinnings of North Korean society is crucial to understanding the basis for North Korean negotiating strategy.

Four major events figured most prominently in Kim Il-Sung's decision to embark upon a nuclear weapons program: the U.S. dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, U.S. threats to use nuclear weapons during the Korean War, Soviet backpedaling during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and South Korean efforts to produce their own nuclear weapons. These incidents triggered the mindset for Kim that the nation that possessed nuclear weapons was very powerful and could do almost anything it wanted to do.

Despite harsh economic conditions and near complete isolation from the outside world, North Korea has built a solid technological foundation for its missile systems. Secret agreements, income produced from illegal drug trafficking and counterfeiting, and massive amounts of food and other humanitarian aid have allowed North Korea to covertly develop the technology necessary to produce nuclear weapons, and they are on the verge of producing a complete weapon. The time has passed to agree to a resolution that persuades North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons program.

Recommendations:

The Bush administration has been too hard-line and must pursue a different course in order to obtain results. The U.S. must provide a security guarantee to North Korea in return for some verifiable actions on their part. In conjunction with this guarantee, move U.S. troops out of their role as a security blanket for South Korea. Use leverage with Japan to ensure they do not threaten North Korean security by embarking on a military buildup. Consider removing North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism if they will cease drug trafficking and counterfeiting and eject known terrorist organizations from their country, which will allow international monetary assistance that will assist in rebuilding their economy. Open a liaison office to begin serious diplomatic relations.

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A Nuclear North Korea?

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Korean peninsula is a strategic centerpiece and an important link to East Asian diplomacy. Both geographically and ideologically, it is a Pandora's box of negotiation and confrontation, where China, the United States, South Korea, North Korea, Japan, and even Russia all have interests converging and diverging at the same time. Other Asian and some European nations have economic interests on the peninsula, but none as vital as the six just enumerated. It is challenging, to say the least, to bring all six nations' representatives together to obtain consensus on a resolution of North Korea's nuclear weapons program, but that is something that must occur sooner rather than later.

To some, North Korean ambitions are based upon sketchy and biased news reports. Many others barely know where North Korea is located on the map, although that number has surely increased over the past few years. Those same people probably would not be able to differentiate North from South Korea if presented with the official names of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Republic of Korea (ROK), respectively. Those who do know better are well aware of the current world situation, some of the history of the past decade, and the role North Korea plays in it. In formulating any sort of viable foreign policy, it is imperative to have an understanding of the political atmosphere, capabilities, perceptions, and goals of the opposite party. Key to gaining this understanding is acquiring all relevant information through monitoring of media, official dialogue, well-qualified interpreters (as required), awareness of cultural paradigms and traditions, intelligence collection with an

emphasis on Human Intelligence (HUMINT), and, if possible, a cadre of people who have interacted on many levels with citizens of the subject country. This last point is especially relevant, as these people will have already established a rapport from which to build future negotiating relationships. Relying on second-hand sources can result in skewed observations and incorrect conclusions about a nation's orientation and objectives. Any agreement reached through ultimatum that expects North Korea to take unconditional and unreciprocated actions is doomed to failure. Simply because of extreme economic concerns, North Korea may make hollow promises in order to get what it wants, ironically damaging its reputation in subsequent negotiations.

North Korea currently presents a conventional arms force that is large and, although ill-equipped, could inflict serious damage upon U.S. and South Korean forces stationed near the border, plus innumerable civilians living in and around the capital city of Seoul. Ballistic missiles and rockets that are clearly within range of anywhere in Japan also threaten the status quo. The alleged chemical and biological weapons capability contributes to this danger, creating a deterrent effect that has been a factor in restraining the U.S. from exercising its "military option" in the past. Numerous artillery tubes pointed directly at Seoul are the most significant threat if projectiles are fitted with nuclear material ("dirty bombs") or nuclear explosive devices. It is clear North Korea has a program to produce weapons-grade nuclear material, if not actual weapons. However, uncertainty concerning the regime's intentions with regard to this nuclear program continues to frustrate nations across the globe and particularly the United States. As a minimum, a North Korea that possesses nuclear arms threatens Northeast Asia and especially its southern neighbor. At worst, it threatens the entire Asia Pacific region and, potentially, United States interests worldwide due to the wide range of covert delivery devices.

In the final analysis, the primary, overriding concern from the U.S. point of view is East Asian regional stability because of the impact on U.S. national security interests. Figure 1 depicts Korea's location at the crossroads of this region. The U.S. strategy in throughout East Asia, according to the Clinton Administration, was to maintain U.S. "leadership in...mutually beneficial economic relationships and...security commitments within the Pacific rim" in order to foster stability of the region and ensure prosperity for all nations. These objectives are met through promoting human rights and democracy, advancing economic integration, and enhancing security arrangements.¹ Current U.S. strategy continues to embrace these general concepts as well, but as regards the current standoff specifically, the stated policy is nothing less than complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement of all of North Korea's nuclear programs, not just the weapons programs but civilian use as well, in order to prevent similar occurrences in the future. The policy implication is that it is extremely difficult to implement due to concerns about yielding to "nuclear blackmail" on this issue,² and the U.S. has resisted meaningful dialogue outside of Six-Party Talks up to this point, but some give-and-take will be required in order to reasonably attain progress. However, significant underlying concerns related to Korea also exist – the possibility of nuclear weapons proliferation, strategic relationships with other Asian nations, and U.S. troop deployments and base operating expenses through a time of constrained resources are foremost among these secondary concerns.

North Korea is not just some second-rate, inconsequential nation that the U.S. can hope to bully into submission. The regime has valid and clearly expressed security concerns. This essay will argue that current U.S. policy towards North Korea is too hard-line and inflexible, and

¹ A National Security Strategy for a Global Age (Washington, DC: The White House, December 2000), 58.

² John R. Bolton, "U.S. Efforts to Stop the Spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction," testimony before the Committee on International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives, 4 June 2003, <<http://www.state.gov/t/us/rm/21247.htm>> (accessed 20 March 2004).

that in order to maintain stability and achieve national strategic goals with respect to the Asia-Pacific region, U.S. policymakers must comprehend and adapt to the myriad of experiences which affect the Korean psyche. In short, the United States must subjugate its pride a little to gain a lot and work *with* instead of *against* North Korea in order to defuse the current crisis.

The questions that must be asked about the DPRK are these: Why does the DPRK want a nuclear weapons program? Is United States policy towards North Korea adequate and proper? What are the ramifications of continuing the current policy? What should be done to alter the policy? This essay will seek to answer these questions by analyzing the development of the current standoff between the United States and North Korea with a view from the most important aspect of all – through the eyes of the North Korean leadership – and present a plan with which to jump-start negotiations and ultimately, perhaps, accommodation.



Figure 1. (Source: CIA World Factbook 2003, http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/reference_maps/asia.html)

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL SETTING

Geography and history are among a complex set of factors that influence any nation's decision making, and for the large majority of the world, most of those factors exist as one form or another of external pressure. However, each country also has some degree of pressure internal to it that governs its relations with other countries, whether due to national laws, national culture, historical experience, the individual personality of the leader, or some other factor. In the case of North Korea, it is these internal factors which drive much of its interaction with the outside world, rather than external influences.

Koreans immediately declared their independence from Japan at the end of World War II on 15 August 1945, although no central government was yet formed. However, under an agreement for expediency among the Allied powers, Japanese forces in the northern portion of the country surrendered to Soviet representatives and those in the southern portion of the country surrendered to U.S. representatives. The Soviets rapidly solidified Communist control of the North and formally established North Korea, known officially as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), on 9 September 1948.

Deepening tensions with the West and a desire to unify the Korean peninsula resulted in the Korean War beginning in June 1950. At that time, North Korean Communist military units invaded South Korea under the pretense of defending their national territory and responding to attacks by South Korean military, which they claim were prompted by U.S. imperialistic urges. In reality, Kim Il-Sung had gravely underestimated U.S. intentions for the region. He assumed that the U.S. would not intervene because the Korean peninsula lay outside its declared area of

interest. Kim's assumption was based upon what amounted to a poorly conceived U.S. policy with respect to Communist aggression, whereby a U.S. military withdrawal from Korea had preceded a statement from Washington that drew a defensive boundary line defining U.S. concerns in the Asia-Pacific region, excluding Korea in the process.³ American strategists had simply not considered the possibility of this sort of Communist expansion in a time when all eyes were focused on Europe and the Soviet Union's Red Army, leaving an open door for Kim Il-Sung to reunify his countrymen. Immediate intervention by the United States and others on behalf of the United Nations to bolster South Korean efforts, and later by China on the opposing side, resulted in a see-saw front line ranging the length of the peninsula. An armistice concluded in 1953 formally established a four-kilometer-wide Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) along

defendable terrain that is near the original demarcation of the 38°N latitude parallel.

See Figure 2 for the current national boundaries and major city locations.

Both the original arbitrary division and the new DMZ separated many family members who were trapped on one side or the other, creating a rift unlike even that seen during the American Civil War. In the close family structure of the Korean society, these divisions were felt as keenly as a severed limb.



Figure 2. (Source: U.S. State Dept, <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/ci/kn>)

³ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 474.

In order to gain a true perspective on attitudes and intentions with regard to the DPRK, one must first understand the historical development of the nation, as well as its cultural underpinnings. It is a natural tendency to assume that any adversary is similar to you; this makes analysis and planning simpler, whether it is in statesmanship, warfighting, business, or sports. However, the assumption of similar beliefs, values, and experiences, or the outright disregard of them, can have severe consequences.

Korea was a sovereign nation, albeit a relatively small one, on a unified peninsula for 1200 years, and the people fiercely defended their independence. Koreans make up their own ethnicity, distinct from Japanese and Chinese, a distinction of which they are proud. Largely a society indoctrinated in Confucian beliefs, tight Korean family groupings permeate every aspect of the culture. Five primary relationships dominated the social structure of the country, four of them in a vertical arrangement and the last clearly not. In order of priority by Confucian teaching, these are as follows: Father-Son, Ruler-Subject, Husband-Wife, Elder brother-Younger brother, and Friend-Friend.⁴ In today's South Korea, these relationships are still very important. In North Korea, the significance of these relationships is paramount and magnified greatly since substantially less progress and development has influenced change, although Kim Il-Sung and his successor Kim Jong-Il have perversely modified them. To the Western outsider, though, while such relationships are important, they do not represent the priority system upon which all else is built. To those in Korean society, the loyalty inherent in these relationships as well as the relationships themselves forms the basis for pursuing all further interactions.

After numerous conflicts with both China and Japan, the Kingdom of Korea retreated into itself, severely limiting foreign travel, immigration, and international trade. This isolation earned

⁴ Paul F. Chamberlin [President of Korea-U.S. Consulting, Inc., author of Korea 2010: The Challenges of the New Millennium (Washington, D.C.: the CSIS Press, September 2001), and Korea-specialist in various previous positions for the U.S. military establishment], interview with author, 4 December 2003.

Korea the nickname of the “Hermit Kingdom” from Westerners who attempted contact with the country. For nearly two hundred years, while Europe was undergoing the renaissance and scientific and industrial revolutions, a still independent but weak Korea spent time as a protectorate of China, in a relationship akin to the Elder brother-Younger brother. China was the “big kid on the block” in the region, and a sovereign Korea paid tribute to them in return for assistance in self-defense against growing Japanese power. As China’s power began to wane in the 19th century and other imminent threats loomed, such as Russia and Japan, Korea looked to the West.

Early Political Experiences

In dealings with other countries, the relationship is normally an inherent one of Friend-Friend, but actually building such a relationship does not occur overnight. A certain amount of trust must be granted initially and continued trustworthiness earned over time. The United States does not have a great deal of credibility with North Korea, dating back at least to 1882. In that year, the U.S. signed a treaty with the King of Korea which was viewed by Koreans primarily as a security guarantee and a chance to begin building a relationship with a rapidly growing Western nation. The U.S. government interpreted the treaty as akin to a business contract that provided commercial interests a foothold into East Asia someplace in addition to Japan, where Commodore Matthew C. Perry, U.S. Navy, had forcibly opened a door nearly 30 years earlier.⁵ A contract, as viewed in Western terms, required each party to fulfill certain specified obligations, and any other relationship that develops is an extra benefit. To Koreans, though, this

⁵ Chamberlin, interview. See also Howard M. Krawitz, Resolving Korea’s Nuclear Crisis: Tough Choices for China, Strategic Forum, no. 201 (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, August 2003), 2.

treaty represented the beginning of a relationship that they hoped would foster other developments.

Economic progress did not, however, explode in Korea as it had in Japan, nor did Korea anticipate world events and begin to integrate Western culture into their society the way Japan had. The “relationship” between Korea and the U.S. soon became nearly non-existent, and as Japan consolidated power in East Asia, the U.S., under Theodore Roosevelt’s administration, came to an agreement with Japan in 1905 that essentially nullified the 1882 treaty with Korea; although no specific arrangements were discussed, it made Japan the de facto hegemon in Northeast Asia. Japan immediately turned around and forced Korea to sign a document creating a formal arrangement for Japan to act as protector of the peninsula. Within five years, Korea ceased to exist as a unified, sovereign entity as Japanese imperialism led to the outright annexation of that territory. This transition brought an end to over 1200 years of self-rule in Korea. Most Koreans who knew of the involvement of the U.S. would have undoubtedly felt betrayed. Since humans are prone to generalize and create stereotypes for convenience, this incident with the U.S. reinforced a general distrust of all foreigners in the minds of the Korean people.

Throughout the Japanese occupation, Koreans resisted destruction of their culture and their way of life. Because of the shared experiences the Chinese were having, many Koreans fought with Chinese insurgents against Japanese forces throughout eastern Asia. The revolutionary ideas of Mao Tse-Tung found sympathy among many Koreans as well as the Chinese, and Communist ideals spread among Korean communities, including to Kim Il-Sung, the first leader of North Korea, who the DPRK asserts fought with other guerillas in Mao’s resistance movement. When U.S. victory over Japan became apparent, Koreans lobbied the

Allies to restore a unified country after liberation from the Japanese. Nevertheless, U.S. politicians who were eager to end the World War and focused on one priority – defeating Japan – agreed only that Korea should be free and independent “in due course;” this lack of commitment allowed Soviet Communist forces to infiltrate what became North Korea and for the second time disappointed the Korean populace with respect to the United States.

Since announcing the Korean War armistice in 1953, North Korea has remained effectively isolated from the outside world. Although 80% of heavy industry and 90% of electricity generation on the peninsula was located in North Korea immediately after World War II, the isolation from the world markets and focus on military spending has gradually worsened the economy, which has been in continuous contraction since 1990.⁶ General Secretary Kim Jong-Il and his father before him approximate the Hermit Kings of olden days, surrounding themselves with advisors who quite possibly help generate a distorted worldview from which to negotiate. Although the power-elite of the government have had intermittent contact with counterparts from other nations, as well as subversive activities sometimes led by outsiders who were close associates of these same officials, the general population has lived and continues to live in complete isolation – except for limited contact with a group of North Korean refugees living just across the border in China. While the rest of the industrialized world is zooming around on huge highways or enjoying well-developed public transportation systems, North Koreans have very limited mobility; travel inside the country is strictly controlled, a very poor road network exists, and limited infrastructure is in place to support mass transportation.

While much of the remainder of the human race is fascinated by advanced communications and technology, North Koreans feel it is a privilege to own a computer, and

⁶ Michael O’Hanlon and Mike Mochizuki, “Economic Reform and Military Downsizing: A Key to Solving the North Korean Nuclear Crisis?” Brookings Review 21, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 14.

even the Communist elite have extremely limited, if any, access to the Internet and email.⁷ The simple lack of connections to the outside world is astounding: as of 1997, only about 1.1 million total phone subscribers were listed in North Korea (approximately 5,156 per 100,000 population) compared with around 27 million in South Korea, over half of which were mobile users (approximately 45,500 fixed phones per 100,000 and 57,920 mobile phones per 100,000 population). With respect to television, which the vast majority of the world takes for granted, only about 1.2 million televisions exist in North Korea compared with 15.9 million in South Korea.⁸ Those that do own a TV in North Korea find their programming limited to state-sponsored propaganda only.

While America and other nations stuff themselves on readily available fast food and junk food and have overflowing refrigerators, North Koreans are one of the world's largest recipients of food aid, partially in attempts to help recovery efforts from a severe famine occurring throughout the mid-1990's. North Korea imported 100,000 metric tons of food from the U.S. alone in 2003, not counting donations from South Korea, Japan, the European Union (EU), United Nations, and other international organizations. This is below the level usually sent by the U.S. due to lower than normal contributions.⁹ The World Food Program estimates that nearly three times this amount still was needed to feed all of those without adequate sustenance.¹⁰ Although food production has increased slowly over the last few years, the total still is substantially short of the amount required to keep all of the citizens properly fed. The World Food Program said that due to lower international donations than normal, only about 60% of the

⁷ Sang-Hun Choe, "N. Korea Wants Citizens to Be Tech-Savvy," Associated Press wire report, 25 December 2003, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A30572-2003Dec25.html>> (accessed 30 December 2003).

⁸ Derek Mitchell, et al., A Blueprint for U.S. Policy Toward a Unified Korea: A Working Group Report of the CSIS International Security Program (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 2002), 14.

⁹ Associated Press wire report, "U.S. Sending 60,000 Tons of Food to North Korea," Washington Post, 25 December 2003, sec. A.

¹⁰ Phillip C. Saunders and Daniel A. Pinkston, "Seeing North Korea Clearly," Survival 45, No. 3 (Autumn 2003): 86.

goal, as many as 4 million people will remain malnourished due to diverting a large portion of the food to sustain the 1.1 million man military forces in preparation for a possible confrontation. A Unification Ministry official from South Korea also estimated that more than 2 million children under five could face death or disease as a result of malnutrition in the country with the world's highest mortality rate for this age group.¹¹

A characterization of this totalitarian society made by one critic related it to “the closest society on earth to George Orwell’s 1984. A completely totalitarian one-party state ruled by a (single)... leader; the North has subjugated its population to the world’s most intense brainwashing and is constantly manipulating it.”¹² (ellipses in original) The educational system is highly regimented, teaching a self-reliant *juche* philosophy that reinforces the isolationist programme of the government. Together with the isolation imposed on the population, the educational system may be the single most influential reason the general population has not revolted against the oppressiveness of the regime. Kim Il-Sung’s Korea Worker’s Party (KWP) “envisioned the education system as a means to achieve political mind control of the young and mass public.”¹³ This system greatly distorts the realities of the world as we know it, painting what is sure to be a dismal picture of the outside world while uplifting the DPRK with flawed explanations of such things as economics, operation of the government, and history. What passes for religion is crafted by the state apparatus, using the Confucian system as a basis for developing a cult centered on the country’s founder. Kim Il-Sung is practically deified, known as the “Great Leader,” and by law he is the eternal President of the country. One example of the

¹¹ Jong-Heon Lee, “N. Koreans Hit by Reduced Food Aid,” United Press International wire report, 26 December 2003 <<http://www.washtimes.com/upi-breaking/20031226-051056-9545r.htm>> (accessed 10 January 2004).

¹² Jeremy Stone, prepared statement before 102d Congress, 1991, quoted in Barry R. Schneider, Future War and Counterproliferation: U.S. Military Responses to NBC Proliferation Threats (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1999), 24.

¹³ Mitchell, 11.

highly biased teachings, from the official North Korea website, is that he formed the first Revolutionary Communist organization in Korea in 1926, at the young age of 14. Another more potent example of this way of thinking is the clear implication of this statement, from the North Korean official website:

[On] the 9th of August of 1945, the Great Leader Kim Il-Sung gave orders to the Revolutionary Korean People's Army to combat for the final liberation of the motherland. Working together with the Soviet Army (that was participating in the war against Japan), the RKPA and the Korean people destroyed all the directive bases of the Japanese empire. The 15th of August of 1945, Korea was liberated and the victory made possible the dream of the independent motherland.¹⁴

The party platform of the “evil U.S. imperialists” would not hold as much water with the people if any reference to American involvement in ending World War II were included. Just enough facts are included in what poses for the “official” North Korean history of recent conflicts to deter suspicious students from pursuing the truth very far. U.S. “imperialism” and “evil attacks” with regards to the Korean War as well as the current state of affairs is a oft-repeated theme in the brief synopsis of history available online from the North Korean government.

Modern Political Experiences

These statements make North Korea sound paranoid. In truth, Kim Jong-Il and his military leaders probably are paranoid, to some extent, but why resort to designing nuclear weapons? Is it really for defense, or as a bargaining chip, or for some other as yet unrevealed plan? Consider that throughout its history, the Korean peninsula has been somewhat of a “doormat to Asia,” under invasion or threat of invasion, whether that be real or imagined.

Today, North Korea still finds itself literally surrounded by enemies, or at best, friends who are

¹⁴ History of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, <<http://www.korea-dpr.com/history295.htm>> (accessed 2 January 2004).

becoming less trustworthy, in the case of China and Russia. Despite the hardships endured by the people, their extreme repression has so far prevented rebellion and has apparently yielded a relatively strong will to support their government and their current way of life at all costs. According to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the DPRK military received an estimated 34% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in national spending in 2002.¹⁵ This reflects the felt need for defense of the nation, particularly in response to the confrontational and hard-line stance the current U.S. administration has taken under the leadership of President George W. Bush. American actions in Afghanistan and Iraq certainly do not relieve any fears the North Korean leadership already had, and statements regarding a possible “preemptive nuclear strike” serve only to sharply increase anxiety and lend more credence to the need for a stronger deterrent ability.¹⁶

Evidence in the official press, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), of their viewpoint is the frequent rhetoric such as “The U.S. has craftily worked to exploit those meetings for the settlement of the nuclear issue between [North Korea] and the U.S. as a leverage for attaining its sinister aim,” and that acts taken by the North Korean government in 2003 were justified since they were “clearly seeing through the true aggressive nature of the U.S. imperialists.”¹⁷ The specter of the Korean War looms over the people. Reminders of it persist in all Korean media, especially the exhortation to remain alert for “another American attack;” many of these reminders come on or near the anniversary of the start of the war.¹⁸ The government leaders may or may not truly believe all of this and much more false information themselves,

¹⁵ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook 2003 (Washington, DC: GPO, 2003), accessed at <<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/kn.html>> (accessed 15 November 2003).

¹⁶ Daniel A. Pinkston, “North Korean Motivations for Developing Nuclear Weapons,” Center for Nonproliferation Studies North Korea Special Collection, 30 October 2002. <<http://cns.miis.edu/research/korea/index.htm>> (accessed 15 November 2003).

¹⁷ Mike Allen and Thomas E. Ricks, “N. Korea Has Mixed Message on Talks,” Washington Post, 30 December 2003, sec. A.

¹⁸ Pinkston.

despite the historical facts readily available from sources outside their own archives, but undoubtedly the paranoid sentiment is real.

The collapse of Communism in the USSR and its satellites in Eastern Europe, together with the warming of Chinese-U.S. relations over the past two decades, is sure to have shaken North Korea's confidence in its allies. American dichotomy between statements and actions with regard to Taiwan's relationship with China creates skepticism in North Korean minds that any U.S. promises would be upheld. The U.S. troop presence for over 50 years in South Korea and Japan also threaten "imperial expansion" into their territory, mandating a strong North Korean military deterrent that could take many forms.

One potentially strong deterrent could be nuclear weapons. However, much of the work on the program has been done independently and with little chance for verification by outsiders of any kind, so claims made by North Korea about its nuclear capabilities should be viewed with skepticism. Many Soviet technical advisors left the DPRK almost overnight in the early 1980's upon discovery of possible work towards nuclear weapons. Although Russia, and before that the Soviet Union, receives a great deal of criticism for its policies, the commitment to non-proliferation of nuclear weapons technology has been resolute and unfaltering. Despite the similarities of economic hardship and excessive defense spending which the Soviet Union experienced, North Koreans may view the USSR's collapse as due to Western "imperial" tampering with the internal affairs of the state, as well as a lack of commitment to Communist principles, thereby justifying their *juche* self-reliance and keeping external influences to an absolute minimum.

While China traditionally enjoys a favored status in Korea, its own national security concerns have resulted in pulling back somewhat. This was most evident in the 1970's when the

Chinese quietly withdrew assistance to develop civil nuclear power generating capability as a result of their suspicions that North Korea was interested in producing nuclear weapons.¹⁹

Recent indicators that the DPRK has that China is more reluctant to assist include their reduced economic aid and a temporary stoppage of fuel oil shipments. While North Korea has filled some needs by finding other trading partners, this may not always be an option. A pact between China and North Korea signed in 1961 is still in effect, however, providing credibility on China's end that it will provide "friendly cooperation and mutual assistance" in the event of troubled times, including conflict.²⁰ Moreover, it is unlikely that China would permit a collapse of the North Korean regime in the near term as it provides a security buffer from U.S. influence in South Korea, an influence which would surely continue if Korea were united under the South's rule.

Kim Jong-Il, the only leader other than Kim Il-Sung that most North Koreans are likely to have ever known, quickly established himself based upon his father's position and usurping the first two of the five primary Confucian relationships in order to ensure his preeminent position: Father-Son and Ruler-Subject. He has become known as the "Dear Leader" as a result of his inculcation of the people, and even the official DPRK website emphasizes this fact, for those residents privileged enough to have access to it.²¹ After entering the website, a picture of a flower named after the Dear Leader is presented, Kimjongilia. The exalted place that these two leaders hold due to the propaganda and loyalty which is inbred, particularly for Kim Il-Sung, greatly influences the cultural beliefs of the North Korean citizens today.

¹⁹ Chamberlin interview.

²⁰ Krawitz, 2.

²¹ Online at <<http://www.korea-dpr.com/pmenu.htm>> the only content on the welcome page is pictures of the two Kims (accessed 2 January 2004).

Because of their isolation, North Korean citizens have little understanding of the paranoia gripping their leadership. One can only guess what they know or think about nuclear weapons development from what the government has told them. Regardless of any paranoia, absolute rulers enjoy their position, and outside of the world's democracies, "one is struck by how tenaciously rulers cling to power."²² Absolute power corrupts absolutely, as the saying goes, but sufficient wisdom has prevailed to bring the regime to an important conclusion. Pyongyang clearly has discerned what deterrence theorist Kenneth Waltz writes about deterrence, insofar as a country with hugely disproportionate numbers of nuclear weapons, the U.S. vis-à-vis North Korea, is still deterred by a small nuclear force because no one can promise with surety that a (conventional or nuclear) first strike by the U.S. will wipe out the possibility of (nuclear) retaliation.²³ Without complete comprehension of the North Korean mindset and the history that produced it, the task of resolving the current crisis becomes infinitely more difficult. An analysis of the most likely factors in the genesis of North Korea's nuclear program, as follows, will provide some insight into this mindset.

²² Kenneth N. Waltz, "Nuclear Myths and Political Realities," American Political Science Review 84 (September 1990): 737.

²³ Waltz, 734.

CHAPTER 3

OBJECTIVES BEHIND THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAM

To come to grips with the real intent and purpose of the North Korean nuclear arms program, it is imperative to understand the nature of the internal politics and motivations of the central government. North Korea is quite possibly the world's most centrally planned society, surpassing even the Soviet Union at its height. As a result, the various committees and councils debate actions to take and may even provide recommendations, but make no mistake, President Kim Il-Sung in the past and General Secretary Kim Jong-Il today have an iron hold on the processes of the governmental and hence societal machinery. Especially on the most critical matters, whatever Kim says is translated into action.

It is simple enough to see the basic reasons for Pyongyang's harshness towards the international community. The Dear Leader wants for his country what every leader wants, and every bit of media representation proclaims it. He wants to ensure the survival of his country and the legacy left behind by the founder. In other words, survival of the regime and the political system it espouses is crucial. Many threats to the security of his country exist, as they always have, and the United States is considered not the least of them. Possessing nuclear weapons is one possible solution to providing the security that he desires, but to what end? Are they intended to be offensive, defensive, or simply a deterrent? Secondary to that, he wants to transform North Korea into a relatively strong state, as well as to unify the Korean peninsula and reunite all the Korean people as one. This last is less practical given his methods and threats. The self-reliant *juche* ideology requires the DPRK to do all of this without depending on too much help from outsiders. The Great Leader had embarked upon a military buildup long ago,

initially assisted greatly by the Soviets; he groomed his son, the Dear Leader, to assume that burden when the time had come for it.

Beginnings of the program

Since the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ending World War II, Kim Il-Sung understood the power of the atom. At the time, it was difficult for him to fathom how quickly a nation as strong as Japan could be brought to its knees after the first hand experiences he had had as a guerilla, struggling against their oppression. He witnessed the Japanese ruthlessness exercised on his enslaved people, their brutal treatment of the Korean women in particular, complete disregard for human life except their own, and especially the ferocity of their army. The indelible impression etched in his mind of the almost instantaneous Japanese surrender after the U.S. used two nuclear weapons formed part of the basis for Kim Il-Sung's nuclear aspirations, remembered clearly into the last years of his life.²⁴ If a country as strong as Japan could be forced into submission this easily, he surmised that any country possessing nuclear weapons would be feared indeed.

Early in his rule, the Korean War served as a second crucible for Kim Il-Sung's policy decision-making basis. Because Kim truly believed U.S. intervention in a purely Korean conflict would be minimal, a belief bolstered by U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson's January 1950 proclamation of an American defense perimeter that excluded the Korean peninsula, President Truman's decision for immediate American intervention in defense of the South Koreans surprised Kim, and the Communist forces were further shocked by General MacArthur's

²⁴ Alexandre Y. Mansourov, "The Origins, Evolution, and Current Politics of the North Korean Nuclear Program." The Nonproliferation Review 2, no. 3 (Spring-Summer 1995): 28.

successful envelopment at Inchon.²⁵ Even the devastating air strikes by the American military, which literally leveled every major inhabited area in North Korea, could not convince the Great Leader at that time that the Americans were serious enough to ultimately use nuclear weapons against his small country if they felt it necessary to ensure victory. He reportedly reacted with “undisguised fear” that he had underestimated the enemy so much when he later learned that the U.S. had been genuinely tempted to use nuclear weapons against his troops and that his country may one day become the next victim of “the U.S. nuclear monster.”²⁶ A noted scholar writes that the single greatest deterrent to nuclear proliferation during the Cold War was the superpower alliance networks.²⁷ Simply having a nuclear-equipped ally was sufficient for states to feel protected. By extension, and coinciding with the strong American belief that the Korean War was actually Soviet aggression outside of Europe, the U.S. refrained from nuclear attacks due to the fear of Soviet retaliation and expansion of the conflict into a nuclear World War III. Classic deterrence had worked. Kenneth Waltz goes further to say that since none of the parties to a conventional conflict can predict the outcome, they may have good reason to prolong the struggle; nuclear exchanges, on the other hand, produce an easily imaginable catastrophe and so leaders will tend to not initiate a trip down that road.²⁸ The mere threat of nuclear weapons, however, left a large bruise in Kim Il-Sung’s ego but did not yet induce him to embark on a research program since only the U.S., USSR, and UK had “the bomb” at this time; he also did not yet fully realize the U.S. threat to North Korean security that he would later perceive.

²⁵ Roy E. Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu*, vol. 1 of *The United States Army in the Korean War* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center for Military History, 1992), 72-73.

²⁶ Mansourov, 28.

²⁷ Michael J. Engelhardt, “Rewarding Nonproliferation: The South and North Korean Cases,” *The Nonproliferation Review* 3, no. 3 (Spring-Summer 1996): 31.

²⁸ Waltz, 734.

As discussed earlier, commitment to relationships form the backbone of interaction in the Korean tradition. The DPRK established working relationships by the end of the Korean War with both China and the Soviet Union, and these ties remained despite the widening differences of opinion between the two Communist giants. Although isolated diplomatically from the rest of the world, North Korea remained acutely aware of world events, especially those affecting other Communist states. President Kennedy's strong stand in October 1962 took the world to the brink of nuclear war, staring down Premier Khrushchev over missiles being placed in Cuba. The Soviet Union blinked, and a severe miscalculation by the Premier forced him to withdraw the missiles to prevent a nuclear holocaust. Again, deterrence had succeeded, forcing the superpowers to find a way to deescalate rather than escalate,²⁹ this crisis tested the connection between the Soviet Union and Cuba and ended up straining the Soviet-North Korean relationship as well. The Soviets never deployed their nuclear weapons into North Korea, nor ever considered the state as a satellite, like Eastern Europe throughout the Cold War. Pyongyang had also expected some small amount of assistance from Moscow when the Americans intervened in the Korean War, but it got none. To the DPRK, the perception was now clearly ingrained that Soviet national security was not worth risking at least a nuclear confrontation nor maybe a conventional one for an ally; despite the Mutual Assistance pact that the two countries had recently signed, the Soviets probably could not be trusted when it counted most. These two incidents began to damage relations between the two Communist regimes and reinforced the concept for Kim Il-Sung that North Korea must rely upon itself for maintaining national security.

Despite the fact France had acquired nuclear weapons only two years before the Cuban Missile Crisis and China would in the near future, the Great Leader was not terribly worried by these acquisitions in terms of his own national security. Surely he considered British and French

²⁹ Waltz, 740.

possession of nuclear weapons as solely deterrent in their own right, given the character of their relationship with the Soviet Union; he had no reason to fear Moscow's growing nuclear arsenal, and he had sufficient dialogue with Chinese leadership to know their intentions. Kim Il-Sung's main concern rested with the U.S. and South Korea, which he considered as a U.S. "puppet state", and his pursuit of unification led to significant negotiations with his neighbors to the south; he believed he was making progress. Therefore, when he learned of a secret nuclear weapons program in South Korea in the late 1970's, he was devastated; it is likely that this eye-opener was a turning point in his thinking. This provided "bitter proof that he had misjudged his southern opponents and.... [it] was such a blow to Kim Il-Sung's personal vanity and sense of national pride that, reportedly, he could not bear it." The United States coerced South Korea into abandoning the project, but only by threatening removal of their umbrella of protection and informing the leadership of the clandestine introduction of U.S. nuclear weapons on their soil;³⁰ from nuclear land mines and artillery shells to tactical missiles and bombs, many of these weapons deployments had occurred as early as 1958.³¹ Final withdrawal of these weapons did not occur until 1991.

This unique set of circumstances against the backdrop of the Cold War established a point of view that only North Korea could comprehend. A number of factors combined to push Kim Il-Sung over the edge: an explosion of atomic weapons in World War II, the devastating power of which stunned the entire world; seriously threatened use of nuclear weapons by an enemy that had vastly superior conventional forces in terms of both armaments and number of

³⁰ Mansourov, 29. See also Engelhardt, 32.

³¹ Robert S. Norris, William M. Arkin, and William Burr, "NRDC Nuclear Notebook: "Appendix B" Deployments by Country 1951-1977," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 55, no. 6 (November/December 1999): 66. See also U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense (Atomic Energy), *History of the Custody and Deployment of Nuclear Weapons: July 1945 through September 1977* (Washington, DC: GPO, February 1978) excerpts available at <<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/news/19991020/>> (accessed 4 January 2004).

personnel; a potentially broken defense relationship with a close ally, in a country where personal relationships mean the world; and a gross miscalculation against a demonstrably treacherous opponent in a political/military contest where he believed nuclear weapons were off limits. Probably this last event, in the late 1970's, drove the Great Leader to order the commencement of a covert nuclear weapons development program. Withdrawal of Chinese

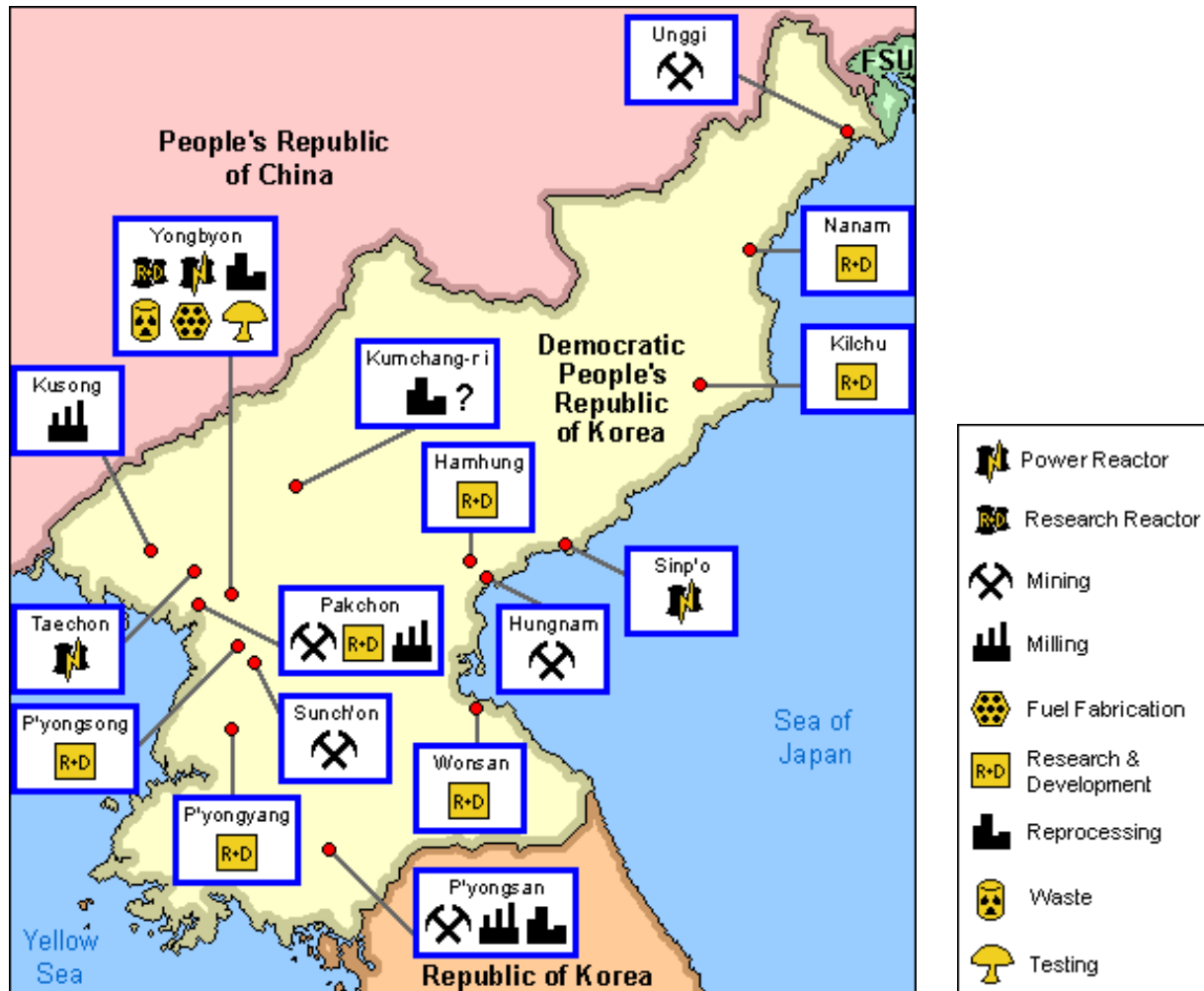


Figure 3. 1999 Map of North Korean Nuclear Infrastructure (Source: Center for Nonproliferation Studies, <http://cns.mis.edu/research/korea/nuc/map.htm>)

civil nuclear power assistance around the same time frame, as noted earlier, also supports this conclusion. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the locations of various elements of the program. With the evident direct security concerns of U.S. forces in South Korea and historic arch-enemy Japan,

and based upon numerous statements by the DPRK (i.e. from Kim to spokesperson to press), the purpose of these future nuclear weapons would be *deterrent*. Kim knew he could not target his colleagues and in some cases family members to the south, no matter how much he felt betrayed, because his people would not stand for it. But he could threaten to target the next best thing if the U.S. attacked North Korea: America's strongest Pacific ally and North Korea's ancient enemy, Japan. "Indeed, in October 1994 one DPRK [senior] diplomat in Moscow [said] in a half-joking manner that the KPA needed only as many nuclear warheads as there were main Japanese islands (i.e. four)." Similar statements had been made earlier that year, as well.³² This kind of threat to expand a conventional war into a nuclear one in a neighboring nation could potentially create a nuclear free-for-all, resulting in truly colossal numbers of casualties. Furthermore, the concept that "how much is enough" in nuclear deterrence means only "having a second-strike capability"³³ is reinforced. Destroying only a portion of a nation's nuclear arsenal means little if sufficient weapons remain to be a deterrent, and public opinion in democracies would surely dictate that even one unlocated nuclear weapon presents a credible threat in most circumstances. That sort of force could only be a deterrent force, for even most critics believe that North Korean leadership is rational, if a bit eccentric.

Drawbacks to DPRK possession of nuclear weapons

Since only Kim Jong-Il truly knows the intent of his nuclear program, the rest of the world is still guessing, despite having a decade to decipher it. The reason for continuing the program today may be entirely different than originally envisioned by Kim Il-Sung. However,

³² Mansourov, 30.

³³ Waltz, 738.

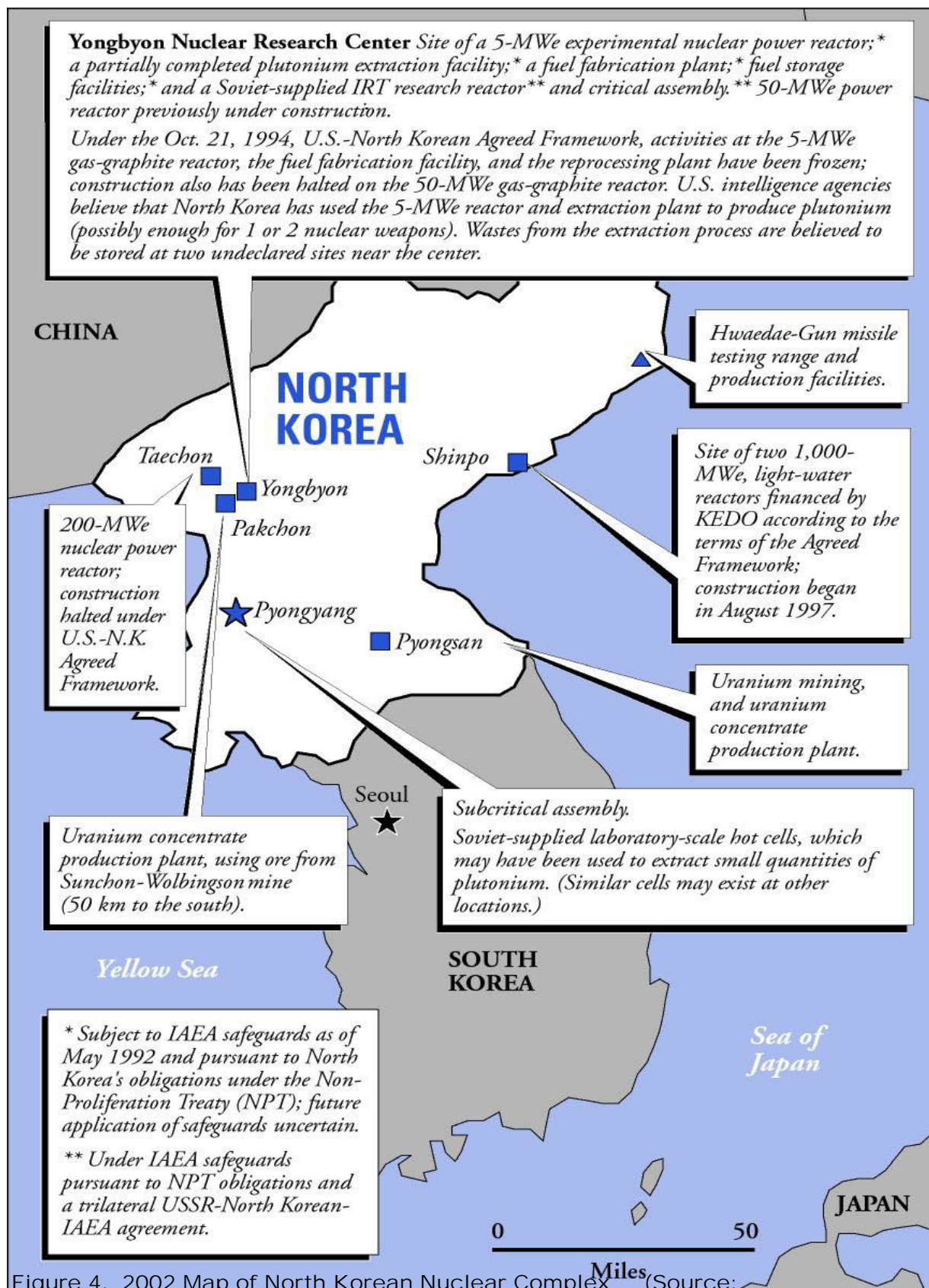


Figure 4. 2002 Map of North Korean Nuclear Complex (Source: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Deadly Arsenals* (2002), www.ceip.org)

the single most often cited purpose for North Korea's development of nuclear weapons is to enhance its national security. One highly relevant element that the leaders appear to have overlooked is, in pursuing their own national security, they are threatening the national security of their neighbors in ways that are unacceptable. Pyongyang's aspirations have unwittingly placed the country in a classic security dilemma. Although China has been a source of proliferation concern for their activities in other parts of the world, and it acceded to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) only in March 1992,³⁴ Beijing has been an anti-proliferation loyalist in East Asia because it fears their traditional foes just as much as North Korea does. More to the point, China seeks a leadership role in East Asia and is horrified by the possibility of a nuclear arms race in the region.³⁵ It is for this reason in addition to its ability to subtly influence North Korea that China has accepted the lead role in bringing parties together to get the crisis resolved. Japan's intentions pose quite another problem.

The Japanese people have largely feared themselves over the past 58 years, feared extreme nationalism and the militarism that may accompany it. Stemming from memories of the conditions which led the nation into imperial conquest and eventually World War II, their constitution prohibits a large military and instead establishes what amounts to no more than a self defense force. The same portion of the constitution ensures an anti-nuclear position. However, within the last year many politicians, academic researchers, and bureaucrats have called openly for Japan to acquire nuclear weapons, a step which would also require an amendment to the constitution and has stirred much debate. Before this decade began, similar

³⁴ Rodney W. Jones and Mark G. McDonough, Tracking Nuclear Proliferation: A Guide in Maps and Charts, 1998 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1998), 19, 50-51.

³⁵ Krawitz, 5.

suggestions would have resulted in ostracism and calls for those leaders to step down.³⁶ Much of the nationalism is benevolent and currently revolves around the Japanese economy since it has been stagnant for so long. Once the leader in East Asia, China's economy has eclipsed Japan's as the leader with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) approaching twice that of Japan's.³⁷ Many of the mainstream nationalists are doing no more than calling for economic reform, as they recognize the perils of continuing on the current course they have set and grow more disillusioned in the government's ability to pull the country out of a slump. They advocate improvements in the overall administration of business and in sectors not related to military applications. Significantly, however, Ichiro Ozawa, head of Japan's Liberal Party, spurred by North Korean threats, asserted, "If we get serious, we will never be beaten in terms of military power," threatening in the same breath that it would not be difficult for their industry to produce three to four thousand nuclear warheads.³⁸ In the early 1990's, statements like that were absolutely unthinkable. Japanese remilitarization, particularly if orchestrated by extreme nationalists, could provoke even more hostile North Korean measures as additional threats to security are perceived, escalating the crisis further or creating a whole new crisis for East Asia.

Another unintended and apparently overlooked consequence may be a renewed South Korean effort to produce nuclear weapons. Since the U.S. withdrew the weapons they had stockpiled on the peninsula in 1991, no clear nuclear umbrella has protected the South. If their effort to develop such a technology in the 1970's was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back for Kim Il-Sung, such a program should be relatively easy to resurrect with sufficient motive. Technological capabilities today could likely produce results in a shorter time, as well.

³⁶ Eugene A. Matthews, "Japan's New Nationalism," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 6 (November/December 2003): 76-78, 82.

³⁷ CIA *World Factbook* 2003.

³⁸ Matthews, 76.

This in turn could increase general tensions in the region and generate interest in Taiwan beginning such a program. Taiwan has toyed with the idea of building nuclear weapons in the past, but the U.S. persuaded Taipei not to continue.³⁹ Taiwanese possession of nuclear weapons is China's worst nightmare,⁴⁰ especially in light of their recent saber rattling over independence issues, and it could destabilize the region to the point of war if Beijing attempts to unify the two Chinas by force.

If North Korea insists on pursuing nuclear weapons development, the security of other nations will be directly challenged; this challenge will affect the entire Asia-Pacific regional stability as these other nations strive to counter the perceived threat. A leading concern of the U.S. and other nations, which runs a close second to the destabilizing effects in East Asia, is the potential for proliferation of North Korea's nuclear technology. Clear evidence exists that North Korea already exports numerous variants of short-range ballistic missiles as well as some production facilities to other nations, mostly in the Middle East. In fact, they are the world's largest exporter of such products. Some evidence also suggests that, in circumvention of a self-imposed moratorium on missile flight testing, North Korea is working with Libya and Iran to develop longer range variants of these missiles.⁴¹ Although no known shipments of nuclear material outside the country have occurred, the world community cannot discount this future possibility because of the potential income it would produce for the government. Also, despite strong security at nuclear sites, concern always exists regarding rebel elements within such a tightly controlled society. A good example of this is the theft of numerous packages of nuclear

³⁹ Joseph Cirincione, Miriam Rajkumar and Jon B. Wolfsthal, Deadly Arsenals: Tracking Weapons of Mass Destruction (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002), 20.

⁴⁰ Krawitz, 2.

⁴¹ Cirincione, 241. See also Caren Bohan, "Bush to Reward Libya for Giving Up WMD," Reuters News Service, 19 December 2003, <http://news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story2&cid=584&u=/nm/20031220/pl_nm/libya_bush_dc&printer=1> (accessed 20 December 2003).

material traced to Russia since the USSR disintegrated. Criminals stole an “undisclosed amount” of (weapons-grade) Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) from a research facility near Moscow,⁴² and Russian naval officers appropriated several fuel assemblies from a nuclear submarine decommissioning and storage facility in Murmansk.⁴³ The apparent intent in both of these cases and numerous others was to sell the material to organized crime figures, but authorities have intercepted all attempted sales known to date. North Korea must be vigilant to prevent similar occurrences, for if the world were to learn of such a theft or even the outright sale of such materials, the consequences could well be more than the DPRK is willing to accept.

Additional considerations

Moreover, if nuclear weapons are ultimately developed, a command structure for their possible use is essential to proper control. Command and control of nuclear forces presents a formidable challenge in a society such as North Korea’s in which a great degree of trust is placed in only a few people. Additionally, the challenges of physical security of any nuclear weapons produced would likely force the arsenal to maintained small. One way to mitigate these security concerns is to store the weapons components separately, as India and Pakistan are thought to do.⁴⁴ The Korean People’s Army (KPA) has not taken part in the nuclear weapons development, so far as is known, but surely the General Staff would have some knowledge of the program. Kim Jong-Il, as the President of the National Defense Commission, the highest military body providing direction to the armed forces, acts as the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of

⁴² Jones and McDonough, 28.

⁴³ Graham H. Turbiville, Jr, Weapons Proliferation and Organized Crime: The Russian Military and Security Force Dimension, Proliferation Series, INSS Occasional Paper #10 (Colorado Springs: USAF Institute for National Security Studies, June 1996), 30-31.

⁴⁴ Cirincione, 191, 207.

North Korea. He is likely to maintain direct control of all nuclear decisions, as did his father, and his position allows him direct access to the General Staff. Military control of nuclear weapons-capable forces is harder to determine, but what is likely to be a deterrent force would probably consist of some small number of similar nuclear bombs, not the array of weapons types the Soviet Union and U.S. constructed. Therefore, the Army component of the KPA would most likely not have control of the weapons for lack of a delivery vehicle, with the possible exception of only building small enough warheads to place in artillery shells. It is rumored that North Korea planned to purchase at least one Golf-class Russian diesel-electric ballistic missile submarine,⁴⁵ but this transaction does not seem to have taken place. No other naval assets the North Koreans possess would be capable of delivering a nuclear device except via cruise missiles, but this is extremely unlikely due to their short range. An innovative approach would be to mount a Scud variant or the indigenous No Dong missile (approximately 1000 km range) on a naval vessel and attempt to sail close enough to an intended target to launch it. Major problems with this approach are significantly decreased accuracy due to ship's motion and lack of a stealthy approach – the ship would be easily detected with its “cargo” long before coming within necessary range of a distant target.

The most likely option for control of North Korean nuclear weapons, therefore, would be the Air Force. Most analysts presume that the Air Force controls the present missile “fleet” possessed by the KPA, to compensate for its obsolete squadrons of old Soviet aircraft, and nuclear-capable units would be expected to remain small and tightly controlled. Missile development has been consistently funded for substantial research and development, and scientists have made significant progress. The only other possibility is if a separate Strategic Missile Force is created, as Russia and China organized their forces, but the continuing

⁴⁵ Mansourov, 31.

ambiguity of statements issued by Pyongyang makes this option unlikely. Establishing a separate and distinct military organization for control of nuclear weapons would remove any doubt about the status of the program.

One possibility concerning the ambiguous and sometimes even contradictory statements issued by Pyongyang is that the statements may be that way by design, in order to keep the West guessing. It is even likely that the English translations of controversial press reports issued by KCNA are intentionally translated incorrectly to elicit a response.⁴⁶ However, the subtleties inherent in Korean sometimes do not translate well into English. Occasionally, government language experts at summit meetings raise concern by the translations they provide, which the DPRK government later denies its officials said. This linguistic barrier should not be overlooked as it provides one of the few available clues to the Dear Leader's mindset. Some admissions and prompt retractions of statements related to the nuclear weapons program, as well as bits of information about equipment or capabilities that have "leaked" out, such as alleged HEU capability, may have been deliberately played cards designed to give the West clues to ponder and give themselves something else with which to negotiate.

Although North Korea still conducts illegal activities such as drug trafficking and counterfeiting in order to produce income for the state, many analysts believe the North has not actively engaged in or supported terrorist-related acts in over 15 years, at least not directly.⁴⁷ While North Korea does not have a good track record with keeping formal agreements, various agreements concluded over the same time period have proven North Korea's ability and desire to become a part of the "community of nations," contrary to what detractors in the Bush administration would have the American public believe. The withdrawal from the NPT is

⁴⁶ Saunders and Pinkston, 84.

⁴⁷ Schneider, 24; Saunders and Pinkston, 89; Victor D. Cha and David C. Kang, "The Korea Crisis," Foreign Policy, May/June 2003, 20.

somewhat understandable in their current position, given the motivation for signing at the start. The Soviet Union coerced North Korea into ratifying the treaty in the mid-1980's, and submission to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections in 1992 was only under massive pressure from the international community as a whole rather than a sincere desire to accept. Pyongyang also was following the letter of the treaty, if not the intent, by withdrawing due to a conflict of interest – it could not pursue nuclear weapons while party to an international protocol prohibiting such action. In an attempt to show good faith, the North Korean government issued a statement in 2000 condemning terrorism in all its forms as unacceptable to international norms and contrary to global security interests, and they have followed up the statement with interest in becoming a participant in several international conventions on terrorism.⁴⁸ Press statements are all well and good. It is past the time, however, to take positive action with respect to the regional and global terrorist threat as well as other illegal actions, and Pyongyang needs to be proactive in this regard.

Most recently, an unofficial U.S. delegation visited the Yongbyon Nuclear Research Facility, site of the country's 5 Megawatt-electric (MWe) nuclear research reactor and suspected site of plutonium reprocessing and extraction activities.⁴⁹ This team of scientists and diplomats traveled at the invitation of the government in its effort to produce tangible evidence for the U.S. that North Korea has both the capability and intent to build nuclear weapons. Though the visitors were not trained inspectors, they were experts in the field, and this tour of the facilities is noteworthy since it marks the first visit by outsiders since the DPRK ordered IAEA inspectors to leave late in 2002. They found evidence that North Korea has the capability to produce weapons-grade plutonium, considered by most experts to be the most difficult step in

⁴⁸ Saunders and Pinkston, 89.

⁴⁹ Glenn Kessler, "N. Korean Evidence Called Uncertain," Washington Post, 22 January 2004, sec. A.

constructing the weapons, but no proof of any actual deterrent such as a functioning weapon or an explosive device. Nor could they determine how much plutonium may have been reprocessed into weapons-grade material or when the material their hosts displayed was produced. No matter the DPRK's technological capability of producing an explosive device, time is not on the U.S.'s side for coming to a suitable resolution. Regardless of the assessed likelihood of North Korea abiding by the terms of a multi-lateral agreement, resolution of this standoff has no other viable option for the nations most affected by a new nuclear arsenal. Ignoring the crisis will not make it go away, and going to war over it entails such high risks that it contradicts the whole point of getting resolution, which is to increase regional stability.

Common rhetoric in the press notwithstanding, Kim Jong-Il apparently recognizes the desperate situation in which his country finds itself. Nevertheless, he is faced with balancing the *juche* self-reliant ideology instituted by his father on the one hand and the bleak outlook for his country's economy on the other. It is becoming steadily more difficult for him to justify not restructuring somehow, as evidenced by the unexpected and aggressive reforms that the Dear Leader implemented in July 2002. These changes were modeled on those the Chinese and Vietnamese have made, such as special economic zones, liberalization of prices, and other significant steps,⁵⁰ but these were even more ambitious than the Chinese or Vietnamese programs were in the beginning. The changes were so sweeping that they may have been too radical and too fast for the economy to absorb, and some declared the experiment as a failure within six months after implementation. Most analysts as well as Chinese government officials believe, though, that more gradual reforms along similar lines may be more successful.⁵¹ All things considered, opening up the economy will ultimately facilitate increased exports, after time

⁵⁰ Michael O'Hanlon and Mike Mochizuki, "Toward a Grand Bargain with North Korea," The Washington Quarterly 26, no. 4 (Autumn 2003): 12.

⁵¹ Saunders and Pinkston, 85.

is allowed to utilize the new influx of raw materials in the production process, and provide the government with the hard currency it so vitally needs. This will also reduce the trade deficit now experienced by North Korea as they encourage new trading partners.⁵² Given the substantial amount of food aid required by the country, which is due in part to the extremely limited amount of arable land, solving the food problems of his people should be high on Kim Jong-Il's list of conundrums to solve if he is to remain in power. Rebuilding the economy could stimulate cash flow and provide the stability that Kim Jong-Il's regime needs to remain legitimate over the long term, thereby improving the stability of the region as well as making proliferation of missiles and nuclear technology less attractive.

These reforms are of paramount importance as North Korea seems to be progressing towards building a nuclear arsenal of unknown size. While the ultimate purpose of the program is unknown to anyone outside the regime, military planners and diplomats must consider all scenarios. Small weapons of the sort that could be used in artillery and launched into Seoul with an incredibly short flight time are potentially the most dangerous. There would be essentially no warning of such a devastating attack. Even more troublesome is the possibility of selling these small weapons or easily-concealed amounts of weapons-grade material to terrorists, whether it is by either official or more surreptitious methods. With its well-documented record of missile technology proliferation, the threat that results from North Korea supplying Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) to the highest bidder is not an attractive sequel to the current crisis. Although hope is not a practical course of action, the world must hope, nonetheless, that Pyongyang has learned some important lessons from recent events in the Middle East and that Kim Jong-Il will respond positively to those lessons.

⁵² According to the CIA's *World Factbook 2003*, the most recent statistics available (2001) estimate a deficit of greater than 50% more imports than exports, in terms of dollar value, with a constantly shifting list of trading partners.

CHAPTER 4

CURRENT TRENDS AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

In the aftermath of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, some nations have taken notice that the United States means business and is actively trying to reduce instability and remedy security issues in the world. A “coalition of the willing,” composed of an odd group of countries, stood side by side either in word by supplying moral support or in deed through financial support or troops or ships or other necessary activities and went with the United States into Afghanistan. Leaders worldwide hailed removal of the Taliban and their connection to international terrorism. Although not everyone in the world community agreed with the intelligence estimates and the rationale for invading Iraq and deposing Saddam Hussein, the long-term results of the campaign and subsequent nation-building efforts show potential for success.

Iran, another part of the so-called “axis of evil,” confessed in October 2003 that it has had a secret program designing WMD for years. The world community suspected such a program for a long time, and this confession seems prompted by U.S. accusations resulting from recent intelligence reports. Additionally, Iran’s leadership has taken action to allow safeguards inspections by IAEA teams regarding their nuclear weapons program with little notice to the facilities involved. Reportedly, this admission came after several days of negotiations with British, German, and French diplomats representing the European Union (EU), and the statements were undoubtedly motivated at least in part by economic concessions granted by the EU for complete transparency in Iran’s uranium enrichment and other aspects of its nuclear program. One must believe, however, that the invasion of Iraq, Iran’s neighbor, did not go

unnoticed by their leaders, and the admission may well have stemmed from a fear of “preemptive action” the United States may take.

Libya was the latest nation to come clean when it announced on 19 December 2003 that it was renouncing all of its WMD programs and that the government would allow inspections to verify dismantlement. This is likely due to several reasons, complex international relations notwithstanding, but a small part may be the hard-line stance taken by the President against Iraq and his published policy towards non-compliant nations. Negotiations began in secret nine months earlier among Libyan, British, and American officials with the intent to abandon nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons programs.⁵³ The timing of the start of these negotiations cannot be overlooked, coinciding with imminent operations in Iraq. However, it is probable that the invasion of Iraq was simply the proverbial last straw. Over the long term, Libya has faced harsh economic sanctions from the US and the international community for their state-sponsored acts of terrorism, and this may be a move by Muammar Gaddafi, Libya’s leader, to restore his country to the international good graces, to obtain some vital outside assistance for his people, and to rebuild the country’s economy. Whatever the reason, on the surface his pledge appears sincere and full dismantlement will be verified; indeed, initial inspections show dramatic evidence of the commitment to full disclosure, and “a good deal of cooperation”⁵⁴ is revealing significant WMD production facilities. World leaders are taking full advantage to use Iran and particularly Libya as outstanding examples of the benefits of international cooperation and they are calling on “other nations” to follow these examples, clearly a jab at North Korea.

⁵³ Caren Bohan, “Bush to Reward Libya for Giving Up WMD,” Reuters News Service, 19 December 2003, <http://news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story2&cid=584&u=/nm/20031220/pl_nm/libya_bush_dc&printer=1> (accessed 20 December 2003).

⁵⁴ Daniel Williams, “Nuclear Program in Libya Detailed,” Washington Post, 30 December 2003, sec. A.

President Clinton and President Bush have had near polar opposite approaches to dealing with North Korea in order to achieve the same end state for the region. President Clinton took a more controlled and diplomatic approach, reaching out to the regime and attempting engagement in a way that was characteristic of his foreign policy throughout the globe. He assumed that no one was beyond reach in his or her ability to reason. See the table below for a synopsis of the points in the Agreed Framework negotiated in 1994 to alleviate the previous nuclear crisis. The current negotiating team has been much more confrontational and divisive in its approach to the

Table 1: Key Elements of the 1994 Agreed Framework

| North Korea | United States |
|---|---|
| North Korea freezes its operation and construction of nuclear facilities under IAEA supervision. | The United States agrees to provide heavy fuel oil to replace the electrical production potential of the shutdown 5-MW reactor. |
| North Korea allows the canning and nonreprocessing of spent fuel from its 5-MW reactor under IAEA monitoring. Fuel to be removed from North Korea. | The United States agrees to establish an international consortium to construct two modern, light-water reactors in North Korea. |
| North Korea agrees to provide all necessary information and access, "including taking all steps that may be deemed necessary by the IAEA" to determine the accuracy of North Korea's initial declaration on past plutonium production | International consortium agrees to complete a significant portion of the reactor complex, not including key components. |
| North Korea agrees to begin dismantling its finished and incomplete nuclear facilities and to begin removal of spent fuel upon delivery of key reactor components for first light-water reactor. | International consortium to deliver key components for first light-water reactor. |
| North Korea agrees to complete dismantling of its nuclear facilities and removal of its spent fuel upon delivery of key components for second reactor. | International consortium to deliver key components for second light-water reactor. |

(Source: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Deadly Arsenals* (2002), <http://www.ceip.org>)

Korean nuclear crisis, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all political strategy to a situation that is unique. The resulting lack of progress to date is most likely because of a split within the Administration which has yet to reach consensus itself and become a unified front. North Korea has responded with threats of its own while it continues down its merry little path towards becoming (and maybe already achieving status as) as nuclear power. Both sides have failed to live up to the 1994 Agreed Framework, and it is not an overstatement to say that the implications are enormous, with potentially catastrophic results if North Korea detonates a nuclear weapon outside of its own borders or sells one to somebody else who does the same.

Because the DPRK may very well view the invasion of Iraq as yet another reason to be wary, if not terrified, of the United States military, diplomats must find some way to convince the North Korean leadership that they are not next on the “hit list”. Their staunch ideological commitment to a unified Korea under the Communist KWP, as evidenced by the frequent inflammatory propaganda in the North Korean official press, will likely prevent any acceptance of a great deal of Western influence. The regime seems focused currently on simple survival. In terms of acquiring nuclear weapons capability, no one but Kim Jong-Il can positively say what his real intention is. Very possibly, he is simply hedging his bets in an attempt to ensure the security of his nation in the best way he knows by using what little leverage he has to maximum advantage. The research and development conducted to date are sunk costs, so he has nothing to lose and everything to gain by continuing if he cannot be satisfied at the negotiating table. Most likely, he does not have a genuine commitment to obtaining this capability, considering analysts assess that he already maintains a WMD capability in the form of biological and chemical weapons and the means to deliver them through the country’s extensive indigenous ballistic missile program. Numerous statements that indicate a willingness to negotiate away the program

reinforce the idea that Kim Jong-Il will probably continue development of nuclear weapons only if he cannot be reasonably persuaded to abandon the program. Nonetheless, after ten years of threats and negotiations, the U.S. still cannot determine for certain North Korea's real intentions, and therefore the U.S. should not and cannot dismiss the dedication to build nuclear weapons thus far demonstrated. Much work is still required, and both sides must learn to begin trusting each other through a series of verifiable agreements.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

North Korea's position is a difficult one, probably not envied by any nation on earth. It has shown the capacity to negotiate in the past, both in bilateral arrangements with numerous countries and in multilateral measures. It has also shown a propensity to disregard many of its obligations, in detriment to its international credibility, and the DPRK has used questionable reasoning to retreat from many of these obligations, but future commitments cannot be honored if none are made. North Korea has had a short but turbulent history, and Kim Jong-Il finds it easy to justify his present circumstances by blaming everyone else; the international community should refrain from facilitating his claims and take time to truly understand the point of view. While the temptation is strong to just discount any message Pyongyang sends as pure noise-making, world leaders must treat these comments as relevant and analyze them in the appropriate context or risk dire consequences.

In the present standoff, neither side seems inclined to submit to the other. Several days of high level, Six-Party Talks hosted in Beijing, both in August 2003 and February 2004, have produced no results whatsoever, not even a joint statement on common goals. Any attempt by the U.S. to force a settlement with hard-line negotiating tactics will at best produce a worthless agreement – nothing more than North Korea's acknowledgement of U.S. demands by signing a document that they will then proceed to cheat on. This could occur if Kim Jong-Il feels he is under such economic hardship that he would authorize signing anything in return for heavy fuel oil, food, or other humanitarian aid. This sort of behavior has already occurred, when the DPRK acceded to the NPT and later when they first allowed IAEA inspectors into the Yongbyon

facilities. At worst, failing to understand Pyongyang's posture and background will lead to increased instability and decreased security in the region and eventually military confrontation in an attempt to save face.

The bottom line is the United States needs to take a different approach than the one currently in use. Numerous other issues persist, such as Pyongyang's other assessed WMD capabilities (biological and chemical agents), human rights abuses that are "repressive even by Communist standards,"⁵⁵ and treatment of refugees, but no good reason exists to clutter up an agreement of this magnitude with other "minor" concerns. Neither does that mean, however, that questions on these subjects should languish. Once the current crisis is dealt with, and some degree of mutual trust has been established, all parties involved can progress with resolving these additional issues in due time. This gradual approach has been used with a great degree of success in engaging China, although more needs to be done, and there is every reason to believe the same approach would work with North Korea.

Can U.S. national security objectives still be met, or is it too late to persuade North Korea to reverse course? Only serious attempts at diplomacy and goals that can be met within the foreseeable future will matter. A broader view of strategy is appropriate, but only where it overlaps the immediate "tactical" picture of resolving this standoff. The current National Security Strategy states, in part, that a guiding principle to defuse regional conflicts is to be realistic about the U.S.'s ability to help those who are unwilling or unready to help themselves.⁵⁶ North Korea was not unwilling or unready in the past, but it may be now. Libya and Iran presented different challenges and represented different sets of circumstances from which to negotiate, so the DPRK solution must be an original one, adapted to its challenges and

⁵⁵ O'Hanlon and Mochizuki, 11.

⁵⁶ The National Security Strategy of the United States of America (Washington, DC: The White House, September 2002), 9.

circumstances as a nation. A new approach is desperately needed to achieve success, and some suggestions follow.

The Bush Administration must put forth a plausible proposal that will satisfy North Korean desires, possibly through diplomatic channels prior to any further official meetings or via the Working Group that formed after the last round of talks in February, in order to get them to make desirable concessions. The U.S. has no reason to attack North Korea, aside from the current nuclear crisis, but the conventional and suspected chemical/biological agent deterrent is more successful than Pyongyang expects, so why not give them what they want in this case? While on the surface this may appear as appeasement, it costs the U.S. little to satisfy a fervent North Korean concern. Pyongyang has clearly articulated it wants a security guarantee. As long as the wording is crystal clear that it is mutual and includes South Korea, a satisfactory arrangement should be simple. Americans have traditionally shied away from informal agreements with hostile states because of dubious intentions and lack of utility in verifying compliance, as well as the difficulty of complying with such arrangements when international conditions change and national security is at risk. The issue is straightforward, however, in that whether it takes the form of a treaty or simply a handshake, any security arrangement between Pyongyang and Washington could easily be tailored to make it contingent upon North Korea's good behavior and verifiable compliance with provisions x, y, and z, as desired.

The U.S. troops' presence in South Korea has been a constant source of concern to the North due to the perceived high threat to national security, but troop levels have decreased over the decades. Recently, Seoul and Washington finalized plans to reposition U.S. troops from the front-line positions north of Seoul near the DMZ, to new positions south of Seoul. An additional protocol in a security pledge should include U.S. troop withdrawal from the peninsula altogether.

Proper diplomatic maneuvering among allies in the region prior to this move will still maintain stability in Northeast Asia while improving North Korean feelings of security and return U.S. troop presence to the status that was intended in 1950 but with better responsiveness to future crises. These troops and their associated storage facilities could be garrisoned nearby on a man-made island or on relatively close islands such as in the Ryukyu chain or on Guam. With advanced troop transport capability such as the high speed vessel *WestPAC Express*, Maritime Prepositioning Force assets, and better prepared South Korean troops than in 1950, U.S. presence in South Korea is little more than a security blanket these days. The qualitative advantage South Korea enjoys in conventional hardware and tactics balances out the North's numerical superiority better than at any previous time,⁵⁷ extending allowable U.S. response time to an attack, if necessary. Removing American troops would only serve to enhance force protection for most scenarios by reducing the likelihood of early American casualties in an attack as well as reducing exposure to WMD fallout, if any WMD is used. Such a withdrawal should, of course, be subject to similar reductions in North Korean troop presence near the DMZ in order to lessen the threat that Seoul perceives. Trade relationships between all nations of the region and the U.S. are so heavily intertwined that economic incentives could be carefully balanced to protect U.S. interests while still providing both South Korea and Japan with sufficient reason to believe the U.S. does not desire to relinquish its influence in Northeast Asia. Continuing the frequently conducted multinational military exercises will also reassure American allies in the region that they are not being abandoned.

One negotiating tactic that could earn diplomatic kudos is to persuade North Korean leaders that they should use the strong U.S. relationship with traditional rival Japan to help alleviate that would-be threat to security. The U.S. has pushed Japan to be more active in

⁵⁷ Engelhardt, 33.

international security matters, but much of the reason is to allow burden-sharing in global peacekeeping missions. This has resulted predictably in increased defense spending by Tokyo; yet recent increases in Japanese defense budgets indicate they may feel that their Self-Defense Forces would be inadequate to defend against a determined enemy. So while more a potent Japanese military may worry other Asian nations, American interests are protected by limiting the size of the Japanese military and therefore offensive power, to a degree, since that helps to minimize instability in the region by preventing a military buildup in several nations which might feel threatened by excessive Japanese power. Such an arrangement would prevent strained relations between the U.S. and China, who may see such a buildup by the Japanese as being encouraged by American actions, as well as ensure American influence remains effective in the region (counter-intuitively, Japan could possibly enter into a security arrangement with China to jointly protect the region if both countries recognize the risks of a nuclear arms race, thereby squeezing out U.S. influence).⁵⁸ Additionally, careful negotiations must satisfy Japanese interests within Japan, meaning that history cannot be allowed to duplicate itself in the depression and militarization that led to Japanese imperialism prior to World War II.⁵⁹ This should be especially important to Pyongyang, considering the rising nationalism and discussion of nuclear weapons within certain circles in Japan, concepts which before this decade would have met with severe public criticism for even the thought of it but now barely pass notice. The problem then becomes one of treading carefully to prevent the DPRK from utilizing a strategy first made popular by ancient military theorist Sun Tzu – that of breaking up the enemy's alliances. No matter what proposals are made, the U.S. must ensure an unwavering commitment from all nations involved prior to approaching the negotiating table.

⁵⁸ Matthews, 87.

⁵⁹ Matthews, 90.

North Korea's terrorist activities seem to have stopped, although Kim Jong-Il is rumored to have personally directed many terrorist acts in the 1980's as part of his grooming to take the reins of leadership.⁶⁰ Additionally, the U.S. State Department claims that multiple terrorist groups operate from hidden bases in North Korea. The U.S. could offer to take the DPRK off the State Department's list of states that sponsor terrorism, but only after it has ejected the terrorist groups that call North Korea home and proven to stop drug trafficking and counterfeiting as well. That would give some financial incentive, since the income lost by giving up drug trafficking and counterfeiting could then be temporarily made up by grants or loans from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund until the DPRK economy is stronger. As long as it remains on the terrorist list, the U.S. is bound by law to veto all of Pyongyang's requests for membership in international financial institutions.⁶¹ This would help solve the regime's liquidity issues, along with the increased exports that reforming the economy will produce. Not being advertised as a terrorist-sponsoring state would also foster foreign investment to reinvigorate the DPRK's industrial base.

One final but no less important suggested course of action is for the U.S. to abandon its present internal squabbling and pursue serious diplomacy with North Korea, with the objective of normalizing diplomatic relations. This is a desired end state professed by Pyongyang, and one which never materialized although it was part of the Agreed Framework of 1994. Official recognition by the U.S., even in such simple terms as opening a liaison office, would accomplish a regime goal of obtaining international legitimacy in the short term, but it could be a double-edged sword for both parties. The U.S. places some number of its citizens in an environment that risks their capture and ransom, however likely or unlikely that scenario may be.

⁶⁰ Schneider, 25.

⁶¹ Saunders and Pinkston, 85.

Nevertheless, the U.S. would gain a listening post close to the regime and a conduit to information it could not otherwise acquire, which may be infinitely more valuable over the long term than the unknown degree of risk of being taken hostage. This arrangement would also allow better monitoring of humanitarian aid (food, health care, etc.) distribution than is currently possible. The risk that North Korea assumes is its citizens being exposed to Western culture and ideology and the assimilation of Western values. Improved relations on a low level such as this could lead to more involved and permanent diplomatic relations as well as eventual easing of some sanctions as Pyongyang begins to reform its society.

Constructing and implementing a good foreign policy requires an understanding of the political atmosphere, capabilities, and goals of opposing governments. “Countries willing to run high risks are hard to dissuade,”⁶² but maximizing opportunities to gain knowledge of their objectives, culture, and perceptions is imperative to develop a solid understanding of the other side. Deliberately sending mixed messages from either side hampers these efforts and could make difficult situations even worse. A lack of reliable sources of information can result in skewed observations, poor conclusions, and disastrous policy choices towards another nation. In the United States, Congress and the public must be thoroughly but fairly educated on the situation in Korea so that they understand any compromises that are made. In North Korea, openness and willingness to accept viable alternative courses of action will be necessary to conclude any negotiations, much as occurred in 1994. In any case, the situation on the Korean Peninsula represents a major challenge to not only U.S. security and negotiating skill, but also to those of the countries around it, and all involved must take the utmost care to listen to what each other says in order to develop a meaningful and acceptable solution.

⁶² Waltz, 737.

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